The *Other* Assassination Conspiracy

Do Just Released FBI Papers Suggest Obstruction of Warren Panel's Work?

BY J. F. terHORST

WASHINGTON—Very interesting, those 40,001 internal FBI documents on John F. Kennedy's assassination. And, in light of what we now know about the CIA and the FBI, very damning.

The files, released under the Freedom of Information Act, do not provide evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald conspired with others to kill the President. On that basis, the judgment of the Warren Commission would seem to be sustained: Oswald, acting alone, fired the fatal bullets from his Mannlicher-Carcano rifle from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

But if Oswald did not conspire, can we say that the CIA and the FBI did not? We cannot say that. Officials of the two agencies, based on memos from the FBI files, were in collusion with each other. And they were obstructionists to the Warren Commission.

Item: James Angleton, the CIA's chief of counterintelligence, tipped FBI officials that the just-created commission was considering setting up its own investigative staff to ferret out the facts on the Kennedy slaying. Thus alerted, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover persuaded the Warren Commission that the FBI, with help from the CIA, could adequately perform the necessary detective work.

Why?

Was it because the CIA did not want the commission to uncover the agency's attempts to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro with the aid of the Mafia? Was the FBI afraid that the commission's independent sleuths might learn that while the agency had gotten a CIA report on Oswald's reported visit to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City two months previous, the FBI had not made any special effort to keep Oswald under surveillance when he returned to Dallas?

Item: According to the FBI files, Angleton "picked up comments from Allen Dulles" about the Warren Commission's plan and passed them on to the FBI. The late Dulles was the former CIA director and a member of the Warren Commission appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Why would a member of the panel, sworn to secrecy, tip off an old CIA buddy that there was the danger that an independent investigation was likely to be made?

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Item: In early 1964, the commission asked the CIA a series of questions regarding the connections of Jack Ruby, Oswald's killer, with Havana gangsters known to hate Castro. Despite repeated proddings by the commission, the CIA did not respond until the fall of 1964 when the Warren report was being rushed into print. Then the CIA said it had no information on Ruby.

Why did it say that? The CIA, we know now, had in its possession a report from its London station chief that Ruby had visited a mobster named Louis Santos in a Havana prison in September, 1959.

Louis Santos was the cover name for Santo Trafficante, a Mafia kingpin in Florida. According to disclosures of the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1975, Trafficante was involved with underworld leader Sam Giancana in the CIA plot to rub out Castro.

Item: Ten years ago, six years after the Warren report, President Johnson suspected anew that maybe Oswald wasn't just a solo killer. In a 1967 private memo to Clyde A. Tolson, Hoover's right-hand man, Asst. FBI Director Cartha DeLoach disclosed a sensitive feeler from LBJ's closest aide, Marvin Watson.

Wrote DeLoach: "Watson . . . stated the President . . . was now convinced that there was a plot in connection with the assassination. Watson stated the President felt that the CIA had had something to do with this plot."

DeLoach wrote in his memo that he reminded Watson that Hoover had earlier sent LBJ "all the information in our possession" regarding the CIA's "attempt to use former (FBI) agent Robert Maheu (multimillionaire Howard Hughes' chief aide) and his private detective outfit in contacts with Sam Giancana and other hoodlums relative to fostering a plot to assassinate Castro" two years before Kennedy's death. DeLoach said Watson "remembered" that memo, but said that if anything more was available it should be sent to the President.

Why was all this kept from the Warren Commission? When did Johnson first hear about it? The American people did not learn any of this until the 1975 report of the Senate Intelligence Committee that both the CIA and the FBI had withheld vital information from the Warren Commission.

As we said at the outset, none of this proves that Oswald was actually part of a plot to kill Kennedy. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that the CIA and the FBI not only discouraged the Warren Commission from conducting its own independent investigation, but did so to keep the commission from uncovering information that would have been embarrassing and perhaps incriminating.

That, if you ask me, is not only a damning indictment of past behavior, but extremely disturbing for the future.